Seven Steps to Organizing a Local Food Not Bombs Group

At the outset, starting a Food Not Bombs might seem like more than you can handle. Work on the basics, taking one step at a time. There is no need to feel pressured into accomplishing everything all at once. It might take a couple of weeks to get things rolling, or it may take months. One person cannot be a Food Not Bombs group, but one person can initiate a group.

Once you have made the decision to start a local Food Not Bombs group, pick a meeting date, time, and place and gather together everyone interested to talk about what you would like to do. You might start with a group of friends, or members of an existing group, or it could be people who respond to posters and emails announcing your intentions.

The following is a step-by-step process to get your food operation up and running. Because of your unique situation, you may need to add, ignore or reorder steps. Follow the path you feel will work best for your group.

Step 1: Start by getting a phone number, email or postal address. By using a voice mailbox you can have an outgoing message with information about the next meeting time and place, and receive messages so that you never miss a call. You can also post a Myspace, Facebook, Twitter or other website for your group. Many chapters also create list serves on sites like Riseup, Google or Yahoo. Some groups use a commercial mailbox or post office box for their physical address. When you set up your contact information you can ask to have it posted on the contact pages of www.foodnotbombs.net so people can find out how to reach your chapter. The website also provides a wiki, alliance and other self posting sites for you to post your contact information.

Step 2: Make flyers announcing the existence of your new local Food Not Bombs chapter with your contact information and time, date and location of your planning meetings. By handing out these flyers at events, posting them around town, emailing the announcement of your next meeting to friends, classmates and other local organizations you will get additional volunteers and donations of food and supplies. It is helpful to have regularly scheduled weekly or monthly meetings and always know the date of the next one to share at the end of each meeting. Encourage people who may rely on the food to participate in the meetings. Post the time, date and location of your meetings on your websites. We provide sample flyers that you can down load on www.foodnotbombs.net. The agenda for your first meetings can include a.) food collection b.) location for cooking c.) locations to deliver your food. d.) consider a location to share your meals in the future e.) outreach to people who may want to volunteer and join the meal.

FOOD NOT BOMBS
P.O. Box 424, Arroyo Seco, NM 87514 USA
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Step 3: Arrange for the use of a vehicle. Among the members of your group, there might be enough vehicles of the right size for your needs, but if not, you might be able to borrow a van or truck from a sympathetic church group or similar organization. If none of the above succeeds, you can always hold fund-raising events specifically for the purchase of a van or truck. Some groups use bicycles and bike carts to pickup the food and take the meals and literature out to share. Other groups use shopping carts and travel on public transportation.

Step 4: With flyers in hand, begin looking for sources of food. The first places to approach are the local food co-ops, produce warehouses, farmers markets, organic food stores and bakeries. These types of stores tend to be supportive and are a good place to practice your approach. Tell them you plan to share the food with the hungry, delivering food to shelters and soup kitchens as well as providing a regular meal once the chapter is established, and if they are interested and willing, arrange for a regular time to pick up the food each week or as often as is practical. Where it is appropriate, leave literature which explains the mission of Food Not Bombs.

Step 5: Start by delivering your collected food to housing projects, shelters and local meal programs. It is important to get to know the food pantries and soup kitchens in your area. Learn where they are located, whom they serve, and how many they serve. This information will help you plan your delivery route and distribute the appropriate types and amounts of food to each program. This will also give you an idea of when and where your chapter should start to share your regular prepared meals. It is usually desirable to arrange a regular delivery schedule with each location. Building relationships with the other food programs is valuable.

Step 6: Once this network becomes established, start to skim some food out of the flow without disrupting the program. With this food, prepare meals to serve on the streets with literature about Food Not Bombs as well as current issues and related events. It can be very helpful to share meals at rallies and demonstrations first; there your group can recruit more volunteers, collect donations, as well as lift the spirits of those participating in the action. Giving out meals at a protest can build community and supports the cause in a very direct way.

Step 7: Once enough people are involved, consider sharing meals in a visible way one day a week to the hungry on the streets. Cooking and serving food there builds community within the group and is hard work, but this is also great fun. Choose a time, day and location where you will reach the most people. Always be on time. Pick highly visible locations where a diverse population is likely to walk past your food and literature. One aspect of our mission is to help make the "invisible poverty" more visible. The meal and literature can be a powerful way to reach out to the community with the message of “food not bombs."

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SAMPLE AGENDA FOR YOUR FIRST MEETINGS

7:00 to 7:15 - Introductions
7:15 to 7:30 - Contacting food sources
7:30 to 7:45 - Visiting local soup kitchens and shelters
7:45 to 8:00 - Locating a kitchen
8:00 to 8:15- Choosing a high visibility serving location, day and time for weekly meal
8:15 to 8:30 - Choosing contact information for local chapter
8:30 to 8:45 - Set day and time to make your banner
8:45 to 9:00 - Posting flyers about new group and announcements in local papers and radio stations
9:00 to 9:15 - Plan first benefit concert
9:15 to 9:30 - Critique meeting and choose location, date and time of next meeting

THE THREE PRINCIPLES OF FOOD NOT BOMBS

ALWAYS VEGAN OR VEGETARIAN AND FREE TO EVERYONE

Our food is vegan or vegetarian and free to anyone without restriction, rich or poor, stoned or sober. First, the potential for problems with food spoilage are greatly reduced when dealing strictly with plant based foods. Second, we want our food to reflect our dedication to nonviolence and that included violence against all beings including animals. We only prepare food which is strictly from plant sources so people will always know and trust Food Not Bombs that our food is safe and nonviolent. At times, we do get donations of dairy and meat products which might and redirect it to soup kitchens that aren't vegetarian because we believe eating is more important than being politically pure; however, we NEVER cook with animal products ourselves and only share breads that might have dairy when it is not possible to know for sure.

EACH CHAPTER IS INDEPENDENT AND AUTONOMOUS AMD MAKES DECISIONS USING THE CONSENSUS PROCESS

Each Food Not Bombs chapter is autonomous and uses a process of consensus to make decisions. There are no leaders, presidents or directors, and no headquarters. . Everyone in each chapter is encouraged to participate in the decision making including those who depend on Food Not Bombs for their meals. Your chapter may meet once a week or once a month but no one volunteer is empowered to tell the rest of the group how it is to operate and there is no headquarters to direct the activities of any chapter. The process of consensus is not voting or the use of "Robert's Rules of Order" where a majority determine the decisions. In consensus a decisions is not made until the proposal is one that everyone participating supports and can feel good giving their consent. There are a number of resources to help your chapter learn to use consensus on the web and you can also request support from volunteers who have been active in other Food Not Bombs groups.

FOOD NOT BOMBS IS DEDICATED TO NONVIOLENCE

Food Not Bombs is not a charity but is dedicated to using nonviolent direct action to change society. Our volunteers not only provide meals to the hungry on the streets and at protests we also participate in planning and implementing campaigns of nonviolent direct action. Our volunteers helped organize and provided meals to activists at blockades, sit-ins, strikes, marches, tree sits and lock downs. Our actions can involve art, music, puppets, banners and many other creative strategies. Our volunteers have provided food to workers and their families while on strike and they have smuggled food into factory and office occupations. Food Not Bombs volunteers can help facilitate Nonviolence Trainings to prepare for campaigns of non-cooperation and nonviolent resistance. There is nothing passive about nonviolent direct action.

Food is a right, not a privilege!